

7th Fleet Task Force Ends Patrol in the Indian Ocean

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 10 — That statement was seen as the United States Navy task force led by the nuclear-powered carrier Enterprise sailed out of the Indian Ocean today after a month of patrol duty begun during the Indian Pakistani war, the Defense Department announced.

The return of the nine-ship squadron to regular service with the Seventh Fleet in Southeast Asian waters ended a controversial aspect of United States actions during the war on the subcontinent.

The presence of the task force in the Indian Ocean was never fully explained by the Nixon Administration. Because of Washington's condemnation of Indian actions during the war, many Indians looked upon the task force as a provocation, a view that set off anti-American demonstrations, an official Indian protest and a worsening of Indian-American relations.

Pentagon sources and secret cablegrams made public by the syndicated columnist Jack Anderson indicated that the carrier force had at least three objectives; possible evacuation of Americans, showing the flag in view of the presence of Soviet naval forces in the area and deterring India from any thought of extending the war to West Pakistan once East Pakistan fell.

Course Changed After Truce

The task force entered the Indian Ocean on Dec. 14 in the direction of East Pakistan, but after the cease-fire on Dec. 17, the ships changed course and patrolled at a distance.

Last Friday, when asked how long the task force would remain in the Indian Ocean, Jerry W. Friedheim, the Defense Department spokesman, declined to give an exact time, stressing that the United States intended to send units of the Seventh Fleet into the Indian Ocean from time to time, now that Britain was withdrawing from

Today, Mr. Friedheim said that at 6:30 A.M. Eastern standard time, the task force had cleared the Malacca Strait and had entered the South China Sea, returning "to normal operating control of the Commander, Seventh Fleet."

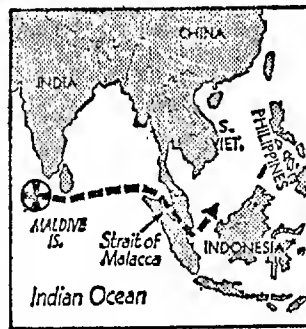
The Enterprise is due to arrive Wednesday at Subic Bay in the Philippines, where the crew is to receive five days of liberty.

For a month before going to the Indian Ocean the Enterprise had been in the Gulf of Tonkin in the position known as Yankee Station near North Vietnam.

Mr. Friedheim said that there were no immediate plans to send in another task force, but added: "I have every confidence U. S. Navy vessels will operate in the Indian Ocean during the next year to 18 months."

"We will do that from time to time; on no fixed schedule, no fixed force level," he said.

Mr. Friedheim said that 15 to 20 Soviet vessels remained in the Indian Ocean, including 5 or 6 combat vessels—2 light cruisers and 3 or 4 destroyers. In ad-



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dition, he said, there are submarines and support ships.

Pentagon officials have said privately that the United States had plans as long ago as 1965 to send ships from the Seventh Fleet to the Indian Ocean to meet that requirements of the Viet-

nam war had blocked its program. In the last year, however, relatively unpublicized exercises were carried out by vessels of the Seventh Fleet including the carrier Ticonderoga in April and the Enterprise in September.

The Nixon Administration has never publicly stated why it was necessary for the Enterprise to enter the Indian Ocean, but Administration officials, who declined to be identified, said the United States had reliable information that India, with Soviet backing, had planned to attack West Pakistan.

They contended that the presence of the task force, as well as a series of messages from President Nixon to Soviet leaders, succeeded in restraining India. The Indian Government has denied it had planned an all-out attack on West Pakistan.

Mr. Anderson, in a column published Dec. 31, disclosed what he said were the top-secret orders to the Enterprise's task force. The alleged orders said:

"Situation U.S. citizens may have to be evacuated from the area affected by the present Indian-Pakistan conflict. The situation may also arise which will require the presence and utilization of a CVA [the Navy's designation for an attack aircraft carrier] to insure the protection of U.S. interests in the area."

"Mission: To form a contingency evacuation force capable of [helo] evacuation of civilians, of self-protection, and of conducting naval air and surface operations as directed by higher authority in order to support U.S. interests in the Indian Ocean area."

In his column today, Mr. Anderson published what he said were Central Intelligence Agency reports about signs that during the war the Chinese might intervene on behalf of the Pakistanis.

"The Chinese have been passing weather data for locations in Tibet and along the Sino-Indian border since 8 December," the C.I.A. was said to have reported. "The continued passing of weather data for these locations is considered unusual and may indicate some form of alert posture."

According to another C.I.A. report, attributed to "reliable" sources, Ambassador Nikolai Pegov of the Soviet Union on Dec. 13 told the Indian government that the Soviet Union "would open a diversionary action" against the Chinese and "will not allow the Seventh Fleet to intervene," Mr. Anderson said.

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